

Gita Sitaramiah, *Pioneer Press*

Most people move less as they age, experts say. But for the poor, it's a different story, involving constant movement between good and bad situations and short- and longer-term durations.

That's among the conclusions in research unveiled Monday at the Homes for All conference at the St. Paul RiverCentre. Hundreds of affordable housing advocates participated in the conference.

The study of moving trends among the poor was the focus of a session called "Why Low-Income Families Move: It's Not Just About Housing" by researchers Ed Goetz, a University of Minnesota professor, and Kim Skobba of Skobba Consulting. The study involved 47 participants and extended interviews with 15 of them for a year.

Study participants all lived in subsidized housing at the time of the study or were on waiting lists for subsidized housing. Reasons they cited for moves during their adult lives included getting their own place, completing a treatment program or jail sentence, wanting a better place, eviction and leaving behind relationship/ abuse problems. "They were moving roughly every year and a half," Goetz said.

Goetz used a series of bar graphs to illustrate participants' moving patterns and length of stay at residences. They showed no pattern of maintaining a place to live for longer periods as time went on, as many people do unless faced with divorce, foreclosure or other life-changing events.

"You see tremendous instability," Goetz said.

The conference included speeches by U.S. Reps. Keith Ellison and Betty McCollum as well as U.S. Sens. Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar, all Democrats.

Klobuchar said she found while she was Hennepin County's chief prosecutor that kids who fell into crime often had one thing in common.

"What really had a lot to do with it was when these kids had no stability in their homes," she said.

U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan was the keynote speaker. He noted the need to invest in public housing infrastructure.

"Already our country has lost 150,000 units of public housing in the last 15 years," he said.

Ellison noted the urgency of improving the public housing situation.

He said it's not fair for a mother to worry about a daughter getting stuck on an elevator caught between floors, a true story.

Even missing lights make public housing potentially unsafe in too many cases, Ellison noted.

"The reality is we have to do something, because it's not fair for a senior not to know whether she'll make it from the bus to her apartment because she has to walk through a dark corridor," he said.